



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Red Wolf News

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Captive Facility Recovers from Hurricane Damage

Although Hurricane Isabel made no significant impact on the wild population of red wolves, the Sandy Ridge Captive Breeding Facility on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge is still recovering from the destructive effects of the storm. Pens that received minor damage have mostly been repaired. Of the eight pens that were severely damaged, three have been fixed and are usable. A new perimeter fence was recently completed.

Thanks to the rapid response of concerned members of the non-profit organization the Red Wolf Coalition, a donation of \$7,150 worth of fencing materials will aid the reconstruction of Sandy Ridge tremendously. Now that the fence is erect, fencing materials donated by the Red Wolf Coalition will be shipped to the site and stored inside the compound. These materials will be used to repair the five remaining damaged pens. The USFWS Red Wolf Recovery Program extends gratitude to the Coalition for helping restore this important facility.

For More Information:
www.redwolves.com

Fostered Wolf Recaptured and Released

The recent recapture and release of red wolf 11202F on November 11, 2003 was an exciting moment for staff at both the North Carolina Zoological Park and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 11202F is not your average wild red wolf. In fact, she and her brother were famous at a very early age.

Born in the North Carolina Zoo in the spring of 2002 to a captive-bred mother, the two pups began their first adventure before they even began to walk. On May 5th, 2002, the five-week-old pups were transported from the zoo to northeastern North Carolina, where they were inserted by the USFWS into a wild den with two red wolf pups of identical age. The zoo pups were accepted by their wild foster mother and raised along with their adopted siblings.

Captive-born red wolves are periodically inserted into the wild in order to enhance the genetic diversity of the wild red wolf population of northeastern North Carolina. However, the fostering event marked the first time that captive born wolf pups were inserted into a wild litter. All previous insertions of captive red wolves have been made with young adult wolves. Fostering the pups at an early age allows the pups to be raised by a wild mother, therefore increasing their chances of survival.

To view footage of the release, visit: www.fieldtripearth.org



11202F awaits her rerelease to the wild.

According to observations by USFWS field biologists, the experimental fostering event is a success. Not only were the zoo-born pups accepted into the wild litter, but they have remained with their adopted pack even longer than the parents' natural pups of the same year's litter. It is thought that the fostered pups, now yearlings, are helping raise their pack's 2003 litter.

As other pack members go off to hunt, they often leave one or two members behind to "pup-sit." The fostered yearlings, particularly 11202F, were often located in the areas where biologists suspected the pack hid their 2003 litter during the summer. This behavior suggests that the zoo-born wolves are fully adapted to the wild and doing their part to participate in the typical pack structure of wild red wolves.

Where Do Red Wolves Go When They Die?

All dogs may go to heaven but most wild red wolves go to the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin. Ever since the restoration of the first four pairs of red wolves to northeastern North Carolina, recovery program biologists have sent the remains of red wolves killed in the wild to the research center operated by the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

The National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) is a medical laboratory whose mission is to provide information, technical

assistance, and research on national and international wildlife health issues. NWHC scientists perform necropsies on red wolves, providing detailed information about the medical condition of the animal in question, as well as the cause of death. Necropsy reports provided by NWHC are compiled in a long-term database tracking red wolf health.

Biologists rely on the wolves' radio tracking collars to tell them when an animal has died. When a red wolf does not move for six hours,

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Scat!

Evidence of the Red Wolf

Red wolf biologists are using an interesting tool to learn about wild wolves. Scat, the solid remains of a wolf's last meal, can reveal a great deal of information about individual wolves, and the wild red wolf population, as a whole.

When conducting a scat survey, biologists ride All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) throughout the network of dirt roads within the red wolf recovery area, collecting red wolf feces as they go. By examining the size and consistency of scat, biologists conclude whether or not a specimen belongs to a red wolf. Because wolves consume nearly their entire prey, their scat is encased in hair so that bone fragments do not puncture the intestines. Biologists collect part of the specimen, leaving behind a sizable amount. Biologists are careful not to remove the entire scat because red wolves use scat as markers to delineate their territories.

Initially, scat was analyzed solely to determine the diets of wild red wolves. Collected scat was dried in a special oven and biologists sifted through the undigested matter to determine what the wolves were eating. Hair, teeth, and bone fragments were matched to prey species. By studying the composition of feces over several years, biologists became more familiar with the eating habits of the red wolf.

Thanks to recent progress in genetic testing, scat now reveals much more than diet. Currently, scat collected in the field in northeastern North Carolina is shipped to the University of Idaho, to be analyzed by doctoral candidate Jennifer Adams. Adams tests each scat to determine the genetic identity of the animal that produced the fecal matter.

This non-invasive method of genetic testing is an important tool in adaptive management, the recovery



A biologist collects a sample of red wolf scat.

program's process of managing for hybridization with coyotes. "We recognize that hybridization is a serious threat to the red wolf. A key part of the adaptive management plan is to identify canids

[in the recovery area] that are unknown," explains Art Beyer, Field Coordinator for the Red Wolf Recovery Program. Scat analysis tells biologists whether canids in a particular area are red wolves, coyotes or coyote-red wolf hybrids, information that might otherwise be difficult to discern. Art explains that genetic information from scat samples gives the program a "high-resolution picture of a canid so that we can decide how it fits into our management plan."

The work of researcher Jennifer Adams and the University of Idaho increases the ability of recovery program biologists to effectively manage for the conservation of the endangered red wolf. As technology evolves and new questions are posed by researchers, scat studies will likely provide additional answers about red wolf behavior and biology.

Where Do Red Wolves Go.... -Continued-

its radio collar emits a mortality signal. Biologists can then locate the animal and collect its remains. Even when the cause of death is evident, such as when a wolf is struck by a vehicle, the carcass is sent to NWHC. In the case of suspected illegal activity, the red wolf will be sent to the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. Forensic scientists at this wildlife crime lab provide information to law enforcement officers working on a case.

In the history of the red wolf recovery program, the single greatest cause of death appears to be vehicular collisions. A total of 38 wolves have been killed by collisions since the recovery program's inception in 1987. Of the natural causes leading to mortality, the greatest cause of death is known as intraspecific strife, a.k.a. "wolves killing each other." Red wolves are extremely territorial and will defend their territory or social rank sometimes to the point of death. Because of the hazards and hardships of life in the wild, red wolves rarely die of old age, though, once in a while, a few oldtimers beat the odds.

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